

MINUTES

**Quarterly Meeting of the
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION
Held, pursuant to notice
Tuesday, January 25, 2005 — 10:00 AM
Governor's Office Building, Room 470
Jefferson City, Missouri**

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Roll Call
In attendance: **Chairman Emmett Fairfax; Vice Chairman Carson Ross; Member Bernadette Miller; Member Carl Niewoehner; Member General Arvid West**
- C. Introductions
Guests and staff present.
 - 1. Guest: **Col. Wayne Medley**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **David Shafer**, Dept. Commander American Legion; **Lynn Dorrell**, Adjutant American Legion; **James Ernie Lee**, President MAVO; **Jim Lanigen**, VAMC Kansas City; **Ralph Skelly**, Military Order Purple Heart; **Jack Matthews**, President MVC Foundation, Inc.; **Kathy Sturgeon**, St. Louis County Human Services **John Eckhoff**, St. Louis County Human Services; **Richard Heigert**, American Legion; **Jan Driskill**, VAMC Columbia; **Tracy Davis**, American Legion; **John Kerr**; **Kevin Hanks**, MO Army National Guard Member; **Jerry Jones**, VFW; **Irvin Etzold**, American Legion; **James Mareschal**, American Legion; **Warren George**, VFW; **George Newell**, VVA; **Shane Van Steenburgh**, USMC; **James Hughes**, VFW
 - 2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Hal Dulle**, Deputy Director; **Jess Rasmussen**, Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Anne Payne**, Superintendent of Homes; **Tim Norton**, Director of Planning and Property Management; **Stan Baughn**, Director Veterans Benefits Awareness Program; **Pat Rowe Kerr**, Veterans Benefits Awareness Coordinator; **Ken Swearengin**, Director Bloomfield Cemetery; **Mike Robbins**, Director Springfield Cemetery; **Jerry Quigley**, Director Jacksonville Cemetery; **Bill Ransdall**, Coordinator Fort Leonard Wood Cemetery; **Chuck Wooten**, Springfield Cemetery; **Bonnie McNeill-Boyt**, Training Technician; **Daniel Bell**, Public Information Specialist; **Jan Rau**, Administrator Cape Girardeau Home; **Kim Harris**,

Homes Operation Manager; **Kim Cleeton**, Quality Management Nurse Specialists;

- D. Approval of December 21, 2004 Commission Meeting Minutes as Amended. The amended minutes of the previous meeting were approved as recorded.

II. OLD BUSINESS:

Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

Commission Update – Ron Taylor reported the Governor's budget recommendations have not been distributed.

The Governor will hold the State of the State Address on Wednesday, January 26th at 7:00 pm. Budget Books should be distributed on Thursday.

Ron Taylor and Hal Dulle have been busy talking with various legislators regarding their support of the Missouri Veterans Commission budget situation. Mr. Taylor informed that the Budget and Appropriations Committees and the Veterans Committees have all been informed of these issues.

MAVO meeting will be held at 1:30 today in House Hearing Room 6 of the Capitol Building. Governor Blunt is expected to make a brief visit.

Joint Committee Meeting on Veterans Affairs will meet at 5:00 pm in the senate Lounge today.

Hal Dulle advised that the Legislative Reception held on Monday, January 24 at the VFW Post 1003 received favorable comments. Mr. Dulle also stated that House and Senate Leadership have all been made aware of the Commissions budget situation.

Commissioner Niewoehner asked Mr. Taylor when the Commission created the Operation Outreach Program. Mr. Taylor noted that the Operation Outreach Program came from the recommendations of the VBATF, Returning Home Soldiers Subcommittee. This outreach program was developed to assist returning Guard/Reservists with their VA benefits and any additional unmet needs they may have. He noted the outreach program has cost the Commission less than \$25,000 for staff time since its beginning June 2004.

Commissioner Niewoehner asked the status of the video project? Mr. Taylor advised that bids had been received and opened. A group of individuals: Albert Bray, Jill Drennen and Lin Appling are evaluating the bids for quality and responsiveness for what we have asked for and from that they will make their recommendation to OA. State Purchasing in turn will look at price. At that point then State Purchasing basically says the one that should get the bid. That information would then be shared with the five Commissioners and a choice be made at that time to either award the bid or vote not to proceed. Commissioner Niewoehner expressed his concerns that things done that are not approved by the Commission is the responsibility of the Commission and they need to be kept informed. He does feel that the Commissioners should have had an input in this project by now. Commissioner Niewoehner asked how much extra money has been involved for staff time on this project. Mr. Taylor stated to the best of his knowledge the total cost for staff if paid for their time on the video project would be estimated at \$6,000. He noted the 1 million dollar funding for the video project was a specific line item and cannot be used for anything other than its purpose and he doesn't know whether B&P will put back into fund if not all sent by July 1 or put back for another year. He stated the legislators could re-appropriate the money or they could file a new appropriation bill for 1 million dollars from lapse money and give back to the Commission and broaden its usage. If the money is not re-appropriated it will lapse back into GR. Bills Ransdall and Hal Dulle will speak to the Speakers Office regarding this matter.

Commissioner Niewoehner advised that at the Counterpart Meeting at the Lake Ozarks a report from the Vandiver Group was distributed. He asked Mr. Taylor who all this report was distributed too. Mr. Taylor reported that the information from the report was recently finalized and it will be sent to Service Organizations and key legislators explaining the Commissions issues and why we need the funding and the consequences if funding is not available.

Commissioner Niewoehner reported that at the Legislative Reception he was asked by a Legislator what is a veteran? He noted his concerns.

Commissioner West asked if the Commission needed to vote today whether to proceed with the Outreach Project and the Video project? Vice Chairman Ross advised that the Commission has staff that works on these projects and that they should let them run through a process and then the Commission will make the final decision. Chairman Fairfax noted they will wait to hear from OA before any action is taken.

Missouri Veterans Homes: Anne Payne, Superintendent of Homes

Homes Program – Anne Payne reported the census of Homes Program to the Commissioners. The Average Daily Census totals 1,106. She noted last year the Homes operated at 92% capacity. Currently there are 1,097 veterans on waiting list, however an integrated data base across all Homes will be completed March 1st and that will reflect lower number of veterans on waiting list due to multiple applications for the same veteran.

Ms. Payne reported that the donations are on track and healthy and they continue to have local community support in the homes for volunteers and donations.

Ms. Payne reported on a spreadsheet which listed licensed nurse salary by classification per Commissioner Niewoehner's request at the last meeting. The report indicates the classifications, working titles, salaries and some of the challenges the Homes are experiencing with both turnover and vacancy. She noted for FY04 ending in June 2004 the homes experienced a licensed nurse turnover rate across the Commission of 48% and a 21% vacancy rate. She stated during the fiscal year within our existing budget 5 homes increased their induction rate in order to compete in a healthcare market in those geographic areas. St. Louis was included in the induction rate increase many of the nurse classes shown on the report are at the top of the pay range for the state of Missouri as defined by the Office of Administration. The Commission has a priority need to fully fund enough staff to fill all of the vacancies and a flexible pay scale so that we can compete in the healthcare market. Commissioner Niewoehner noted that the report indicates the Commission has 246 empty beds at the Homes and 1,100 veterans waiting to get in. He stated that the St. Louis Home hasn't gained much from the new 100 bed dementia unit opened this past year. Commissioner Niewoehner recognized that the nurses to staff that unit are the most highly trained staff the Commission has. He asked Ms. Payne how the Homes Program got a 9% shift differential. Ms. Payne replied that this has been in place for a number of years and only applies to registered nurses across all Homes. Ms. Payne informed the Commissioners that the Commission is renovating the original 200 beds in the St. Louis facility and 50 of those beds are currently still under that rehab project so they are not available for occupancy.

Commissioner Niewoehner asked Ms. Payne what the distribution of the Homes Program preliminary draft request for new funding needs dated September 17, 2004. Mr. Taylor advised that the report had been distributed to key individuals in Budget & Planning and will be distributed to both Budget Committees. Commissioner Niewoehner stated a copy should be sent to MAVO, members of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and Representatives and Senators who have Homes in

their district. Chairman Fairfax requested that staff distribute a cover letter along with the Homes Program Preliminary Report to those legislators.

Construction Update: Tim Norton, Director of Properties

Construction Update – Tim Norton reported on construction updates.

Fort Leonard Wood Veterans Cemetery: The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers has been given approval to complete the unexploded ordinance survey. They should have a cost estimate to the state within the next couple of weeks to complete the environmental baseline study. Once both of these studies are complete the property can be transferred to the Missouri Veterans Commission. After speaking to Bill Jayne, Director State Cemetery Grants Program the VA has indicated that it is possible that federal funds could be available this fall, but indicated they would more likely be available in the fall of 2006.

St. James Veterans Home, dementia dining/activity room: Final punch list was scheduled for January 6th, although the contractor was not ready at that time. Punch list has been re-scheduled for February 3, 2005. Anticipate residents being able to use this addition in March 2005.

Cape Girardeau Veterans Home, HAVC project: This project consist of upgrading the heating, air conditioning and ventilating system, replacing flooring, renovating and expanding the kitchen, adding a solarium, dementia dining/activity room and painting resident room walls. The Commission forwarded final drawings to VA on January 13th. As soon as we receive their comments we will place the project out for bid.

St. Louis Veterans Home, roof replacement: This project includes replacing the existing roof with a new 40 year architectural shingle roof, adding a security fence around the back of the facility and replacing exterior doors. A pre-bid meeting has been scheduled or February 8th.

Springfield Veterans Cemetery, columbarium wall: VA has indicated this project may not be funded this fiscal year, although MVC has state funding to complete the project. The final bid documents should be available this week. We will forward to VA and put the project out for bid as soon as VA has made their final review. VA will fund project once we move up on their priority list.

Warrensburg Kitchen Spillway Upgrade: Bids were opened January 20th and the project should be awarded within the next couple of weeks.

Commissioner Niewoehner advised that the renovation and construction cost comes from the VCCITF which is generated from the admission receipts from the gaming boats. He noted the Commission needs approximately \$4 million per year for the maintenance, repair, and renovation of the Homes and it also funds the operation of the four state veterans Cemeteries. He noted Fort Leonard Wood State Veterans Cemetery will be coming on line in the next couple of years and will be very costly.

Service to Veterans Program: Sharon Keith, Director, Service to Veterans Program

Service to Veterans – Sharon Keith reported that the Service Officers have been busy. She noted that 6 additional Service Officers are needed and have been requested for the STV Program. The Service Officers have acquired 15,030 overtime hours last year attending Freedom Salute Ceremonies, Supermarkets and Presentations. This is a total of 9 months comp time which totals almost another service officer. To add an additional service officer in each region it would allow those to use time off while still having a staff member available at the regional office.

Ms. Keith reported to date a total compensation/pension claims paid to veterans is \$69,448 resulting from Supermarket held at Vashon High School last June.

Ms. Keith noted that a Service Officer in Milwaukee who receives claims from states informed her that of all states submitting claims Missouri has been most recognizable for the quality of work on claims.

Cemeteries Update: Jess Rasmussen, Director Higginsville Cemetery

Cemetery Program – Jess Rasmussen reported to the Commissioners that February 16th Bill Jayne, Director State Cemetery Grants Program and 14 Cemetery Director Interns from the National Training Center in St. Louis will be visiting Bloomfield Cemetery. This is a very proactive opportunity to work with these people who will eventually be National Cemetery Directors and Program Managers. As part of their training they are coming to us to try to understand how the State Cemetery Programs work.

Mr. Rasmussen reported that the Cemetery Program continues to receive positive feedback from families and funeral homes. Ron Taylor noted these surveys have the Cemetery Program looking into a little more detail due to approximately one year ago VA established a rule to require inspection of State Veterans Cemeteries every three years to determine if they meet the newest guidelines for NCA's measures and standards. It is unclear what the penalties are however complete failure to meet NCA's

measures and standards could lead to a request for the grant that built the cemetery be paid back and decertification would result. Also they could possibly withhold the payments of the burials plot allowance if we are not compliant.

Members received a cemetery statistical report which provided an overview on each Missouri State Veterans Cemetery listing numbers of interments, veteran data and cemetery history.

VSO Grants: Hal Dulle, Deputy Director

VSO Grant Program- Hal Dulle reported that per Commissioner Niewoehner's request he has gathered information to determine the cost per claim regarding the VSO Grants. He stated the range is anywhere from \$7 based on 2,016 claims from AmVets to \$193 for 541 claims filed from American Legion. Ron Taylor met with the Service Organizations to try to define these numbers and coordinate our programs together to get the maximum benefit out of these dollars. Mr. Dulle stated they are trying to seek a solution and they will meet on a regular monthly basis.

Commissioner Niewoehner expressed his concerns that \$750,000 is spent each year on VSO Grants and no report has ever been distributed in the past three years. Commissioner Niewoehner requested a written report from each program be made available at future Commission meetings. He expressed it is very difficult to follow an oral report given during the Commission meetings.

Veterans Benefits Awareness Program: Stan Baughn, Director Veterans Benefits Awareness

Benefits Supermarkets – Stan Baughn reported that 26 Veterans Benefits Supermarkets have been held serving 7,493 registered veterans. He stated 8 Supermarkets have been confirmed for this year to include March 12th at Palmyra, June 4th Hillsboro, and a Veterans Appreciation Day/Mini-Market in Kirksville at the Armory.

As of December 31st the toll free number has received 7,080 total calls, 4,331 were referred to Service Officers. Vice Chairman Ross asked if there was a dollar figure available that is brought into the state from those 4,331 served. Mr. Baughn noted that there was no way to determine that amount. Vice Chairman Ross advised that the Commission may check into advertising the 800# on billboards. Mr. Taylor informed that the Commission has approached the Gaming Boats on several occasions about advertising but we have not received a very good response so far. Hal Dulle has been speaking with Jim Moody, Lobbyist for the gaming boats. Vice Chairman Ross stated he will help Mr. Dulle on this issue.

Ron Taylor advised the Commissioners regarding benefits awareness that the updated dollar and claim figures from this past year are not available from VA at this time. The Commission has been informed that we should have those figures in March, however informally at the meeting with the Service Organizations information from the VFW National Headquarters indicated that Missouri had moved up from 36 last year to number 31 this year. Missouri is still making progress. Vice Chairman Ross noted we should even have more success tapping into urban areas raising awareness. Ron Taylor stated that the Minority Veterans Benefits Coordinator position has been set up and the Commission received 125 applications. They will narrow those down to 25 and try to further narrow down to 12-14 for final interviews.

Stan Baughn informed the Commission he has received requests from 3 states asking for information on promoting Supermarkets. Pennsylvania, Illinois and South Carolina have all asked for information on how to set up Supermarkets. Missouri used Georgia as a model in setting up the Supermarkets, however Georgia, Oklahoma and Wisconsin all hold one large Supermarket each year at one location where as we do multiple supermarkets in areas to try to reduce veterans travel.

Outreach: Pat Rowe Kerr, Veterans Benefits Awareness Coordinator

Outreach – Pat Rowe Kerr introduced four guests to the Commission. John Kerr husband of Pat Rowe Kerr; Kevin Hanks from Springfield returned from Operation Iraqi Freedom; Shane Van Steenburgh, USMC from Jefferson City and has been deployed three times in support of the Persian Gulf and Operation Iraqi Freedom; Robert Wake is a Purple Heart from Malden, Missouri. She noted she was very honored to have all them all here today.

Ms. Kerr distributed a two part document that was also shared with the Legislators indicating where Missouri falls with other states in assistance for benefits for veterans.

Ms. Kerr stated that there are 12,500 soldiers coming back from Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle and they will be entering the VA System. It is important that we talk to our Legislators and continue to distribute our messages on why we need increased staffing, our dollars for our nurses and our support for our Veterans Service Officers.

Ms. Kerr note as we move forward in support of our Supermarkets the Missouri National Guard has offered the opportunity to use their satellite hookups so that we can outreach to veterans that do not have a Service

Officer near they can go to their City Hall and dial up on the computer and have the ability to interface with a Service Officer.

She noted the Commission will be appearing in all the issues of the Production Credit Newsletter except in the bootheel area. The Commission will be again appearing in the American Legion Newsletter.

Mr. Taylor reported the biggest issue when a soldier has been injured is that the local National Guard is not getting updated information on its members when they have entered into medical hold at the hospitals. VA is starting to make a lot of efforts in trying to reach these people but again they are being asked to do this with no additional staff and dollars. Jan Driskill, VAMC Columbia commented that she appreciates the magnitude of the problem.

Vice Chairman Ross asked if the National Guard fall under the jurisdiction of the Adjutant General's Office. Ms. Kerr responded that our National Guard does fall under the Adjutant General until they are activated then they become federalized. Vice Chairman Ross asked that once they return do they come back through the Adjutant General's Office. Ms. Kerr stated no, not until they receive their DD214 and fall back into the roles of the National Guard. Meetings were conducted with the Adjutant General's Office and Commission staff and we were informed that there are no injuries. Mr. Kerr explained that she receives a report from the office of the Surgeon General listing injured members from the Guard. These soldiers however do not belong to the National Guard now so therefore they are not aware of the injuries. Vice Chairman Ross note there is a crack in the system and the Commission needs to figure out how to fill in that crack. Mr. Wake stated that while in medical hold you do not belong to anyone and that no one wants to take responsibility for the wounded. He has been in medical hold since July 2004.

Commissioner Niewoehner commented on an article from the Columbia paper dated January 23rd that the MU Healthcare has started up a video hookup for families with service members in Iraq. He stated it is working pretty well and may be something to take up in other cities and maybe the Service Organizations might want to try this. Commissioner Niewoehner addressed public relations issues within the Commission. He noted we need to get the word out. He distributed a copy of the Truman VA Bulletin to the members and read articles published regarding New Eligibility Web Site, the Veterans History Project and the "Stand By Me" Mentoring Program sponsored by the Columbia School Board. He expressed his concerns that the Commission does not publish a newsletter and therefore we are not getting information out to people on what is happening. He stated feels that there is enough going on in Central Office to publish a newsletter every two weeks. He noted that Commissioners

were not informed of the Employee of the Month reception at Mexico recently and was concerned if the Representative and Senators from that district were notified or not.

Commissioner Niewoehner reported on a January 18th Nightline Program which was about 6 National Guard Soldiers from Louisiana who were killed from one unit and how the families wanted permission from the Pentagon to meet the plane arriving at Dover Delaware Air Force base with the coffins. They were turned down by the Pentagon so the families contacted ABC to photograph the coffins and a full report on the burials. A Senator from Louisiana reported that she is sick and tired of trying to get something through the Pentagon for the benefits of the National Guard. A piece of legislation is going to be introduced in the Senate giving the National Guard members tax and financial benefits, health insurance, tuition assistance and emergency assistance. Commissioner Niewoehner recommended to Missouri National Guard and to all parties interest to contact Senator Kit Bond and Senator Mary Landrieu from Louisiana and put a word in on what we think we need in the State of Missouri get this thing finalized. He noted it cannot be done on individual state bases.

Commissioner Niewoehner informed the Commission that there were 468,000 soldiers from Missouri in WWII. When they returned there weren't any jobs available and the federal government had a program called the 52/20 Club and the GI Bill. The 52/20 Club meant that if you signed up you were paid \$20 for 52 weeks as long as they were searching for a job.

Chairman Fairfax informed that everyone should talk to their Representatives and Senators concerning our Veterans Home Program, Cemetery Program and Service to Veterans Program.

Vice-Chairman Ross noted his concerns with the Swan Lake Memorial Veterans Cemetery, GrainValley/Blue Springs, Missouri. On Veterans Day Vice-Chairman Ross was guest speaker to a middle school in Blue Springs. He and two other representatives from the American Legion Post 499 in which he is a member of presented a new flag to the school. One of those representatives was Robert Boyles, Funeral Director at Swan Lake and he told Vice-Chairman Ross that he was taken back by the comments made in the KC star article. He asked Vice-Chairman Ross to call him. During their telephone conversation Vice-Chairman Ross asked him to attend MVC Commission Meeting in January and make his case to the Commission on their advertising methods. Mr. Boyles was sent an invitation for the January 25th meeting and Jill Talken contacted the office and Mr. Boyles cell number. He did not return calls. Vice-Chairman Ross stated that he heard Mr. Ball report at another occasion that they had spent \$1.3 million in advertising in the KC Star and that they were going to pull

their advertising. He and Hal Dulle recently visited the cemetery and there is no comparison to Missouri Veterans Commission cemeteries. Mr. Dulle has spoken to the Attorney General's Office and they have made some inquiries and have found that Swan Lake's advertising are within state law however the Commission has forced them to change their advertising practices of the facility. The Attorney General's Office will continue the monitoring of the Swan Lake advertising. There are other cemeteries in the Kansas City area that set aside an area for veteran burials however they do not advertise that they are a veteran cemetery. Bills Ransdall advised that years ago a cemetery in the St. Louis area also advertised in this manner and a letter was wrote to the Division of Professional Registration and Licensing and they stopped advertising as a veterans' cemetery. He suggested the Commission write a letter to Division of Professional Registration and Licensing regarding this mater.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

Legislative Update: Hal Dulle reported to the Commissioners that he has met with both House & Senate Leaderships and has been informed that they are in seeking solutions to fully funding all of MVC's Programs. They have gone through the VCCITF item by item, number by number and they have reviewed the decision items. He stated Representative Jackson has committed to fully funding our Homes Programs.

Newly introduced bills which MVC is tracking on veterans' issues includes: the extension of application deadline for the WWII & Korean Medals;

HB220 - Establishes a tuition grant program for children of members of the military who were killed in the line of duty

HB221 - Authorizes an individual income tax deduction for all military retirement benefits received by a taxpayer

HB294 - Enacts safe staffing and quality care accountability requirements for veterans homes and mental health facilities

Vice Chairman Ross cautioned to watch the fiscal note for the VCCITF.

Commissioner Niewoehner expressed his concerns for funding crises of the Homes Program. He noted fiscal year 2006 federal budget for VA Healthcare will likely be cut 3% below the 2005 fiscal year. He shared a letter he wrote to the Commissioners on January 24, 2005 addressing the Veterans Homes Funding Crises (attached) which was placed in all legislatures boxes at the Capitol Building.

Hal Dulle will follow up in scheduling a meeting for the Commissioners to visit Fort Leonard Wood to be held in February. Bill Ransdall will arrange to invite General Castro to address the House & Senate on April 5th.

NEXT MEETING

The next Commission meeting will be held April 5, 2005 at 10:00 a.m. at the Missouri Veterans Commission Headquarters.

With no further business before the Commission the meeting was adjourned.



Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary